

Assessors Act on 28-Point Program

By PHILIE WATSON
County Assessor

Last week State Association of County Assessors' annual conference, held this year at Yosemite, was perhaps the most important and momentous in the association's 63-year history. Meeting in the wake of charges of bribery and pay-offs in some assessors' offices, the association needed to take strong, positive action to demonstrate that the great majority of assessors are keenly aware of the duties to the public and are determined to do all in their power to insure that there can never be a repetition of such irregularities. I am proud that the association did just that.

Its 28-point legislative program lays the groundwork for a much-needed overhaul of assessment and all property tax administration.

IF THE LEGISLATURE passes our program every property owner in the state would be assured of fair and equal treatment under the law. He could be sure he was paying his fair share of taxes—but no more than his fair share.

The number one point in the program, which would require each assessor to use a uniform assessment ratio for all classes of property and to publicly announce this ratio, represents a major shift in the policy of the association and is a major step forward.

In Los Angeles County, ever since I took office, local taxpayers have had the protection of a publicly announced assessment ratio at 25 percent of market value—they need only to multiply their assessment by four to check on whether their property is appraised fairly.

BUT THE current assessment scandal in some other counties has indicated that some taxpayers have been overassessed and some under-

assessed. Every property owner in the state deserves every protection law can afford to make sure he is being treated exactly the same as everyone else.

The full 28-point program falls into three general categories: to provide for fuller disclosure of assessment procedures; to close loopholes in existing law that have permitted irregularities to occur, and to provide assessors with new laws to improve assessment administration.

IN ADDITION to the uniform ratio proposal, other major changes would:

- Require the assessor, when notifying a property owner of an increase in his assessment, also to notify him of the appraised market value.
- Permit the creation of Assessment Appeals Boards in any county that wants them and allow a longer time in which the taxpayer can file an equalization petition. Here in Los Angeles, we already have our Tax Appeals Boards in operation, but property owners elsewhere do not have the same ability to challenge their assessments.
- Require the assessor to make available to authorized law enforcement officials confidential material in his files. I believe this is already implicit in the law, but some assessors during the current investigation took advantage of the "confidential" clause to withhold their records. As a group, we assessors agreed the law should be spelled out.
- Require tax consultants to register with the Board of Equalization and forbid them to charge fees based on the amount of "tax savings" they effect.
- Forbid any assessor or deputy assessor to serve as a property tax consultant while he is in office or employed as an assessor. This would seem self-evidently the law, but some counties, notably San

Francisco, have allowed their assessors a sideline occupation as tax consultant.

• End the taxation of household furnishings. This, of course, is a reform for which I have long campaigned and the assessors' association, in a reversal of its previous position, has been on record for it since last Spring.

• Require the assessment of business inventories in proportion to their annual average value, instead of the stocks on hand on the first Monday in March. This would avoid the disruption in business that occurs at lien date time and would be generally more equitable for all businesses.

• Set specified penalties for taxpayers who deliberately under-report the amount of their property.

TWO ADDITIONAL proposals broke ground in new areas.

The first would require the state to reimburse local government for loss in tax revenue suffered by state-imposed property tax exemptions to special interest groups. Such a law would bring immediate property tax relief to those of us who are now picking up the tab for someone else's exemption.

The other calls for property tax relief for low-income senior citizens by state repayment of all or part of their property tax bills, on a sliding scale geared to the amount of their annual gross income.

THOUGH NEITHER of these proposals is directly concerned with assessment administration, they are a recognition by the assessors of their responsibility, as the best-informed local fiscal officers, to help preserve a healthy economy and a healthy property tax structure. Individually, and as a group, we want to do all we can to prevent sky-high taxes from forcing people out of their homes.

The full program will be offered to the Governor and the legislature for immediate consideration. It is a good program—a strong program.

As an assessor, I am proud of this vital accomplishment of the association conference. With the new, forward-looking leadership the association now has, I believe we assessors can provide the public with significant improvement in the property tax.

STAMP CLUB

The Torrance Stamp Club will meet Nov. 22, at 7:30 p.m., in the Scott Park Community Building, 23410 Cat-skill Ave., Wilmington. Further information is available by telephoning TE 4-6718.

Art Contest Opens Bill of Rights Week

The 1965 observance of the Bill of Rights Week, Dec. 9 through 15, will include the greatest participation of Los Angeles County public and parochial high schools, junior colleges, colleges, and universities in the 25-year history of the annual event, according to Joe Crail, chairman of the Bill of Rights Week Com-

memoration Committee. The opening event in the observance will be an art contest, featuring posters by high school students. The entries go on display at the California Museum of Science and Industry in Exposition Park Tuesday. The posters

will be judged tomorrow by a committee consisting of A. Keihauer, Art Supervisor, Los Angeles City Schools; Elizabeth Franklin, Los Angeles School of Art; Sister Anita, Immaculate Heart College, and Dorothy Buerger, supervisor of Art Education for Long Beach Schools.

The posters will be judged on the basis of originality, visual interpretation of the theme, expression, and art work. In addition to the school observances, courts and religious, civic and governmental groups will also participate in ceremonies honoring

the 174th anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights during the week of Dec. 9 through 15. Another highlight of the Bill of Rights Week will be the traditional program before the Los Angeles City Council at 10:15 a.m., Tuesday, Dec. 14, with participants including civic dignitaries and student leaders from local colleges.

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Gardena Bands Plan Christmas Concert

The Gardena Valley Boys Band will present its sixth annual Christmas Concert at Serra High School, Compton Boulevard at Van Ness Avenue, Dec. 1, at 8 p.m.

The concert will include Christmas selections to be performed by the Varsity and the Concert Band. The three part program is open to the public at no charge.

Artone's "Christmas Tidings" and Klaus's "Jingle Bells" will be played by the Varsity Band. Several selections will be performed by special ensembles from the high school group.

CONCERT BAND selections will include the "Christmas March" by Herfert, "Green Sleeves" by Dillo, and Herfurth's Happy Christmas Holiday" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

Other numbers to be played by the Concert Band, which include 45 members, are "Christmas Season" by Crimle, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" by Packir, "Frosty the Snowman" composed by Nelson and Robbins and arranged by Walter Becker, and "Christmas Parade" by Lass.

THE GARDENA Valley Boys Band is under the direction of William B. Power, di-

rector of music and bands at Serra High School. Auditions for the bands are conducted by Power on request. Boys who would like to learn to play a musical instrument will be auditioned during the last week of January.

Membership is open to boys in grades five through nine. Further information is available from Power at Serra High School, 324-6675. Power may be contacted in the evening at FR 5-6387.

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